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Fifty-first Session

Official Records

64th plenary meeting
Monday, 25 November 1996, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Razali Ismail (Malaysia)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Floods in Honduras

The President: On behalf of all members of the Assembly, may I extend our deepest sympathy to the Government and people of Honduras on the tragic loss of life and extensive material damage that have resulted from the recent floods.

May I also express the hope that the international community will show its solidarity and respond promptly and generously to any request for help.

Mr. Martínez Blanco (Honduras) (*interpretation from Spanish*): The delegation of Honduras wishes to take this opportunity to give this plenary meeting of the General Assembly a brief report on the humanitarian situation in our country resulting from the floods caused by hurricane Marco as it passed over Honduran territory in recent days. We would appeal to the friendly Governments of the world to work with us at this difficult time when millions of our citizens are without housing, food, shelter or adequate medical assistance.

The latest information from the capital indicates that the number of people affected in the northern part of the country, which was the hardest hit, is up to 55,000 people, a total of at least 6,000 families. We are also told that 12,500 hectares of African palm have been destroyed, as have 1,379 *manzanas* of corn and sorghum, 159 *manzanas* of rice and 52 *manzanas* of bananas and coffee. This will have a significant negative impact, amounting to millions of dollars, on the national economy's export sector.

There has also been serious damage to road infrastructure in primary and secondary roads amounting to some 40 million lempiras, the equivalent of approximately $3 million. Bridges have been weakened and the north of the country has virtually been cut off from the rest of the territory. Six thousand houses have been reported destroyed and 10 people died in the early hours of the event. Six of the 18 Departments of our country have been affected, all of which are in the Atlantic region, the most productive part of the country.

The Ministry of Health and Social Aid has declared a health emergency in the north for fear of the spread of endemic respiratory, dermatological and gastrointestinal diseases, such as cholera, malaria, dengue and others. We are particularly concerned about the situation of children, who have begun to show skin infection problems. The President of the Republic has declared a regional emergency.

The Honduran Government has set up an inter-agency commission of representatives of several Ministries that will work with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee in coordinating and distributing all humanitarian aid received. The executive power has set up an emergency fund to assist the victims of this disaster in the amount of some 70 million lempiras, the equivalent of $5.6 million, and the National Congress has earmarked $2.5 million for the same purposes.

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However, the situation is grave and requires humanitarian assistance in order to cover shortfalls in housing, food, medicine, transport and the resettlement of those affected. In addition, it is urgent to pursue effectively the rescue of thousands of families that are still in danger, since the flood water will not begin to drop for another three days.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the Governments of all the brotherly nations that have already expressed their solidarity with the suffering and misfortune of the Honduran families affected by the floods in my country. Our sincere thanks also go to the various international organizations, non-governmental organizations and United Nations bodies. At the same time, we appeal to the international community to support us in this time of need by assisting us, in the manner they deem most fit, to mitigate and meet the needs of those affected by this terrible and unexpected disaster. My country and the people of Honduras are already deeply grateful to them.

Agenda item 48

Strengthening of the United Nations system

Mr. Wisnumurti (Indonesia): The Permanent Representative of Honduras has just informed us of the gravity of the situation created by the hurricane in his country, including the human toll and material damage. Let me, on behalf of my delegation, express our deep sympathy for the people and Government of Honduras. I fully associate myself with your expression of sympathy, Mr. President, and hope that the Government and the people of Honduras will eventually resolve the problems and issues raised by the hurricane with the help and assistance of the international community.

Indonesia has consistently viewed the endeavours to strengthen the United Nations system as a continuous reform process aimed at increasing the capacity of the Organization to play its mandated role, as envisioned in the Charter. It should help the Organization to function more efficiently through a conscious process of readjusting its structure and working methods, which are generally perceived to be a hindrance to its effective functioning. The capacity of the United Nations to pursue these objectives should be strengthened, not weakened, and the operating principles should always be those of transparency, equal opportunity, democracy and full participation of all Member States.

Reforms, be they in the areas of management, organization or intergovernmental process, must be undertaken with the full concurrence and participation of the developing countries, which constitute a majority of the membership of the Organization. The revitalization of this international institution, through a comprehensive process of restructuring its major organs and functions, has therefore become imperative. It is of pivotal importance that the General Assembly, the highest deliberative and decision-making organ within the United Nations system, should function effectively, focusing especially on major issues of political significance. It is our firm belief that the strengthening of the role of the General Assembly is a basic premise of the ongoing process of revitalization.

In this context, the Secretary-General, in his statement to the Working Group last March, rightly observed that the challenge of reform is fundamentally political and should be driven by substantive rather than procedural considerations. He also called for adapting structures and methods to the new global environment and its priorities.

The Indonesian delegation would like to reiterate its commitment to the ongoing process of streamlining and rationalizing the structure and working methods of the General Assembly, which will lead to greater efficiency and efficacy. It is essential to bear in mind, however, that in addressing that issue in the Working Group, the objective is to enhance the Assembly's role within the United Nations. Moreover, the process of reform should proceed on its merits, without diminishing in any way the political importance of the issues under consideration or the right of Member States either to retain agenda items or propose new ones.

Progress achieved to date in the Open-ended High-level Working Group in revitalizing the role of the Assembly, particularly in the context of the reorganization of the Main Committees and their agenda items, the finalization of the revised rules of procedure and the reduction in the number of reports requested from the Secretary-General has been excruciatingly slow. However, it has laid a solid foundation for our future endeavours.

The clustering of some agenda items has already led to tangible results in some of the Main Committees and has since become established practice. It has proven its value for the purpose of eliminating undue duplication and unnecessary expenses without negatively impacting

on the proper functioning of the Committees concerned. My delegation also visualizes the possibility of consideration by the Working Group of the question of clustering similar items in the plenary meetings. There are agenda items that could be grouped together, such as those on cooperation between the United Nations and various regional organizations.

As far as the structure of the Main Committees and subsidiary bodies are concerned, my delegation wishes to reiterate its opposition to the views expressed by a number of delegations calling for the merger of the First Committee with the Disarmament Commission. In our view, each has performed and must continue to perform a distinct role. In the First Committee, the tradition of debates has reflected the position of Member States and clarified the myriad of issues involved, leading to the adoption of draft resolutions. But the mandate of the Disarmament Commission is to provide an impetus to negotiations through the formulation of proposals and recommendations. Furthermore, the usefulness of the Commission can be seen in its agenda, which is clearly focused and item-specific. In addition, non-members of the Conference on Disarmament have the opportunity to participate in its work. Considering these overriding factors, the Commission should continue to meet annually and make its contribution to strengthening the multilateral approach to disarmament issues.

Likewise, my delegation has reservations concerning the proposal to merge the First Committee with the Special Political and Decolonization Committee. Each has dealt with a distinct group of issues. The First Committee has focused attention on a wide range of disarmament and security questions and has acquired expertise in them. The practice of dealing with both disarmament and security in the same forum has proven its value, as have parallelism and the coordination of measures in both of these fields. Disarmament and security should continue to be dealt with by the First Committee, without introducing to its agenda items that are already being dealt with systematically and efficiently by the Special Political and Decolonization Committee.

In the context of the United Nations system, the office of the President of the General Assembly is a vital focal point of interaction for all Members of the Organization, yet the potential of that office has not yet been fully utilized. As such, it should be further strengthened, specifically through the promotion of a key role for and through institutionalizing consultations with the presiding officers of the other organs, especially the President of the Security Council, in the interest of democratization and accountability.

In conclusion, my delegation would like to express its support for the recommendations of the Open-ended High-level Working Group, *inter alia*, that it should continue its work in accordance with the mandate contained in resolution 49/252. In this context, it is our view that annex II of the Working Group's report could constitute the basis of our further work during the fifty-first session of the General Assembly.

Mr. Powles (New Zealand): I would like to associate New Zealand with the expressions of sympathy extended to the Government and the people of Honduras. Our thoughts are with them at this time of need.

As members know, New Zealand was intimately involved with the work of the Open-ended High-level Working Group on the Strengthening of the United Nations System through the role that my predecessor, Ambassador Keating, played as Co-Vice-Chairman of the Group. We would like to take this opportunity to welcome the appointment of Ambassador Lian of Norway to this co-vice-chairmanship and pledge to him, as of course to Ambassador Shah, our full support.

As the Assembly takes up this item at its fifty-first session, we believe it is important to reflect on what the Group has achieved, and to look forward to what remains to be done and what can be effectively accomplished in promoting the strengthening of the United Nations system.

I would like to begin by considering the report of the Working Group (A/50/24), which was submitted at the end of the fiftieth session. That report records the progress achieved in the work of the Group. We believe the report should allay the doubts of most of its sceptics. The "Strengthening Group" has established a critically important milestone in the efforts of Member States to strengthen and revitalize this Organization. It has made a start in responding to the hopes and ideals expressed by so many at the Organization's fiftieth anniversary celebrations.

Both the style and the content of the report set valuable precedents. It demonstrates the positive and cooperative attitudes which prevailed during the Group's work. The clear acknowledgment of the progress achieved is a testimony to the openness of the Group's working methods. It is evidence that inclusiveness and

open-endedness can work. Moreover, it can stimulate a willingness by the members to tackle even the most complex and difficult issues.

We are convinced that we can reshape the future of the Organization, but only if we work in an open, honest, inclusive and cooperative manner. In that regard, the manner in which this Working Group conducted its proceedings will, we believe, be one of its major legacies.

Let me turn now to annex II of the report, the Group's most recent working paper. The frankness and openness of the Working Group in annexing this paper in its entirety to the report is further evidence of the willingness of the members of the Group to adopt a forward-looking approach and sophisticated working methods. The paper in annex II contains not only those topics and ideas on which there was convergence of views, but also those ideas on which there is less convergence.

The willingness of the members to retain all of these ideas in the Group's working paper demonstrates, first, that decisions on many of these complex and far-reaching ideas could not be brought to finality in the few weeks of meeting time available to the Group in 1996. And secondly, it reflects the understandable political reality that in any final outcome to the work of the Group there will be individual ideas or components with which not all members will be entirely comfortable, but which will, when taken together, comprise a whole on which all can agree.

When the Group takes up its working paper again, it will be important for it to hold to the understanding that it should not return to detailed discussion of the concepts on which there was a convergence of views. Clearly some work of a drafting kind will need to be done. But on substance, we need to maintain the momentum, move forward and endeavour to find convergence on the main outstanding issues.

Thus far, the Group has dealt with two major areas of discussion: the General Assembly and the Secretariat. Some of the topics discussed under these headings necessarily overlap. I would like to highlight some ideas which have gained considerable currency through discussion in the Group and which we think will have a significant and beneficial impact on the Organization, when implemented. I would also like to suggest where the work of the Group may logically progress when it comes to take up other matters.

Under the General Assembly topic, the Group identified the need for a more interactive relationship between the Assembly and other organs of the United Nations, particularly the Security Council. The role of the plenary as the primary forum in which the full membership can debate issues of importance in the international community is very much in keeping with the spirit of the Charter. The mechanism for informal consultation described in annex II should help to reinvigorate debate in the plenary on key items.

A second issue discussed under the General Assembly heading, which cannot be ignored when we look to build an Organization that will be able to grow and strengthen in the modern world, is the issue of the relationship of the Assembly, and indeed of the United Nations system as a whole, with the ever growing range of non-governmental organizations and other actors under the umbrella term □civil society□. The recent Economic and Social Council decision 1996/297 has recommended that the General Assembly examine and review the question of non-governmental organization involvement in the wider work of the Organization beyond the Economic and Social Council sphere. This and related issues have already been discussed in some detail by the strengthening Group and there are specific ideas in annex II of its report. The Assembly should note this fact and ask the strengthening Group to further develop convergence on this issue. New Zealand is convinced that developing mechanisms for non-governmental organization interaction with the United Nations system that do not alter its fundamental intergovernmental nature and that ensure that the Assembly and its committees are transparent and provide adequate access to civil society actors will be vital for the future health and credibility of the Organization.

Under the Secretariat topic, there was clear agreement in the Group that the current structure of the senior management in the Secretariat, with a large number of personnel at the Under-Secretary-General level, is unsatisfactory. It runs contrary to the desire for greater organizational efficiency. Annex II of the report responds to some of the Secretary-General's own preliminary thoughts, which he shared with the Group in March. It suggests that the Secretary-General review the functions and number of Under-Secretaries-General, Assistant Secretaries-General and Special Representatives of the Secretary-General, with a view to streamlining structures and making lines of authority, decision-making and accountability more transparent.

It also suggests that the Secretariat would be best served by a pyramidal structure featuring a small senior management group under the Secretary-General. This group would be not a new layer of management, but the result of reforms at the Under-Secretary-General level. The creation of such a management group would be linked to the creation of new coherent and transparent clusters of departments under each member of the senior management group. Again, the Working Group has picked up on and elaborated ideas floated by the Secretary-General in March. We believe that this kind of interaction between the Secretary-General and the intergovernmental machinery is both constructive and dynamic. The time has come, we believe, for more concrete ideas along these lines from the Secretary-General, who, as the chief administrative officer of the Organization, has the right and the authority to make the necessary structural changes, not only in the senior management, but also in the clusters that would work under each of the senior managers.

It became apparent during the work of the Group that one of the major challenges before the membership is how to deal effectively with the reality that the Organization as a whole and its executive branch, the Secretariat, cannot be reformed and strengthened in isolation from one another. The intergovernmental process and the number, structure and interrelationships of its bodies must be addressed.

As Member States, we continue to put a disproportionate and inefficient amount of effort into intrusive and time-consuming oversight of the Secretariat. This is reflected most acutely in the excessive micro-management of inputs in the budget process. Micro-management is the biggest constraint facing both Member States and the Secretary-General in any attempt to improve the Secretariat's performance and to achieve a genuine strengthening of its ability to deliver quality service. We need to strike a balance which ensures effective intergovernmental oversight, but which moves away from micro-management, so that the Secretariat is given the freedom to manage its resources efficiently - and that includes the freedom to decide where jobs are allocated. This would allow Member States to concentrate on setting broad policy and financial guidelines which would give the Secretariat the organizational flexibility most efficiently to pursue the mandates and priorities set by the Member States in the political decision-making process.

The Member States should, via the budget process, determine at the □macro□ level how much money should be allocated to each major area of activity. The Secretariat should not be allowed to transfer funds between these areas, but should have the freedom to allocate staff and financial resources needed to implement mandates within these broad areas.

Having set its priorities, the intergovernmental oversight machinery should then focus on evaluating what the Secretariat achieves with the resources it has been given. A key part of this process of evaluation would be for each Main Committee to evaluate, relevant to its area of work, the outputs of the respective Secretariat departments and divisions.

However, particularly in the economic and social field, it may be necessary to go beyond reviewing how the intergovernmental machinery interacts with the Secretariat. Reform and strengthening of the structure of the intergovernmental machinery itself seems unavoidable. The current division of labour across Economic and Social Council and its commissions and the Second and Third Committees is inefficient, often ineffective and sometimes even counter-productive. The argument for radical reform of the economic and social bodies is a compelling one precisely because the economic, social and developmental programmes of the Organization are defined by so many States as their highest priority for the United Nations. I make this point as an indication of areas to which we, as Member States of the General Assembly, must turn our attention.

In this connection, resolution 50/227 set the useful example of relaying broader institutional issues to the strengthening Group for consideration; this would be efficient for various reasons. But a wider question is the more immediate organizational issue: the problem which delegations face, at a time when the highest priority is being given to the whole reform agenda, in focusing attention and devoting energies to no less than five different high-level Working Groups of the General Assembly. We must begin to think hard about whether our time and resources are well spent in so many working groups.

Perhaps, remembering that we must be sensitive to not allowing groups to intrude into the area of work of other groups, we could look at reducing the number of groups. Some of the Working Groups, whose tasks are less urgent, could briefly go into recess. The Informal Open-ended Working Group on an Agenda for Peace is a good example, because its agenda is timeless in nature. There will be major issues on peace and security to be discussed for many years to come. Perhaps - as it did in 1994-1995 - that Group could recess for a year so that

Member States can focus on the most pressing issues in a smaller number of working groups.

The strengthening Group has achieved a great deal during its brief existence. But it will require the commitment and a redoubling of effort of all Member States to bring this work to fruition and to lay a sound organizational and institutional foundation for the future of the Organization. New Zealand will make that commitment, because we are committed to building a strengthened and effective United Nations that is ready and able to tackle the challenges that lie ahead, and a United Nations system that is more internationally democratic and more representative of the world we live in as the century draws to a close.

Mr. Cassar (Malta): My delegation associates itself with the Assembly's condolences to the Government and the people of Honduras. Our solidarity goes particularly to the families of the victims of the destruction wrought by the hurricane.

I would like to express my delegation's confidence, Sir, that under your leadership the Open-ended High-level Working Group on the Strengthening of the United Nations System will consolidate the achievements registered during the fiftieth session, which were guided by your predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Diogo Freitas do Amaral. I would also like to thank Ambassador Shah of India and Ambassador Keating of New Zealand, who as Vice-Chairmen skilfully directed the deliberations of the Working Group during the last session.

Reform has been on the United Nations agenda for a number of years. Discussions have ranged from the overall reform philosophy permeating the Organization to the specific reform of the functioning of the principal organs of the United Nations. The process has not been an easy one, nor was it as fast as some would have desired. Change within an Organization as complex and politically sensitive as the United Nations requires in-depth consideration and reflection.

Discussions in the High-level Working Group have reflected an awareness of the intricacy of the issues and the skilful treatment they deserve. The wealth of proposals reflects the keen interest of statesmen, Governments, scholars and organizations alike in promoting change to enable the United Nations to respond better to the demands of our times.

Malta strongly believes that if the United Nations is to improve its credibility and authority in the coming years it must improve its structure, its administration and its competence. Our ultimate aim is to have a United Nations which can adapt itself to changing realities and to insure more democracy in decision-making. Reform has not been and cannot be equated simply with cost-cutting.

As priorities change and emerge, structures need to reorient and redirect themselves. This should not be to the detriment of existing programmes which still hold relevance in today's world. Indeed, some areas on which the Organization has focused for a long time have acquired renewed impetus. The cooperation which supplanted bloc confrontation following the end of the cold war opened new avenues to address such issues.

Malta continues to believe that the United Nations, and the Security Council, should become more representative of today's geopolitical realities and must reflect the general views and opinions of the General Assembly.

The General Assembly's revitalization is a keystone of our work. Discussion on questions such as the streamlining of the agenda, time limits on statements and the organization of work is important. Yet these issues on their own will not enhance the relevance and effectiveness of this important body. Most important, the General Assembly should develop a more efficient mechanism by which the United Nations could implement and execute its decisions more effectively and more quickly.

Malta has been in the forefront in advocating efforts to revitalize the General Assembly, which comprises the totality of the Organization's membership. We have stated our support for an enhancement of the role and office of the President of the General Assembly. This office holds great potential, which can be buttressed through the institution of regular consultations with the Presidents of the Security Council and of the Economic and Social Council. Such a structured process of consultation would better the flow of information and facilitate input by the General Assembly. Decision-making can have a stronger impact through the establishment of a more effective relationship between the various United Nations organs.

A second matter to which my delegation has dedicated itself is the discussions of the reports submitted

to the Assembly by the Security Council on its work and by the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization. These are indicative of the need for improvement in the type and nature of the information provided. These reports should enable Member States to assess the success, or otherwise, of activities undertaken. They should contain a balance between the descriptive and the analytical. The reports should be tools of reflection for Member States in helping them set priorities for the Organization and establish the manner in which these can best be achieved.

Increased interaction between the United Nations and civil society is another important area which requires further elaboration. Contributions by non-governmental organizations at the recent United Nations global conferences demonstrated the benefits of an effective partnership leading to an awareness of public opinion and greater involvement at the grass-roots level.

The Secretariat has also been a central point of our discussions. A number of interesting proposals have been introduced on both administrative and budgetary aspects. The Secretary-General's statement contained in annex II of the report (A/50/24) outlines the efforts being undertaken to reform the Secretariat's structures, to streamline activities and to coordinate action. Increased contact and participation with the specialized agencies and the Bretton Woods institutions has enhanced the partnership needed to maximize the benefits of cooperative action.

My delegation shares the opinion that leaner management teams at all levels and the rationalization of the lines of command would make the Secretariat more manageable. Our primary aim should be to enhance coordination and cooperation between different departments and programmes. The point of departure in any reform process is not an arbitrary decision to create additional bureaucratic layers or to delete existing ones, but an objective assessment of existing activities and their coherent direction in a streamlined structure.

Our effort to strengthen the United Nations system is best guided by a renewed faith in the principles on which this Organization was founded. The means we adopt to strengthen the United Nations system should further enhance and underline these principles and preserve that balance which is an in-built characteristic of the Charter.

Mrs. Vargas de Losada (Colombia) (*interpretation from Spanish*). My delegation too wishes to convey its condolences and feelings of solidarity to the Government and the people of Honduras at this time when a natural disaster has caused that country much damage in terms of human lives and economic damage.

I am honoured to address the General Assembly - the supreme organ of the Organization, in which all Member States have a seat and in which they act on the basis of the principle of sovereign equality - in connection with the question of the strengthening of the United Nations system, which affects each of us directly and profoundly. Pursuant to resolution 49/252 of 14 September 1995, which established the Open-ended High-level Working Group on the Strengthening of the United Nations System, the Group worked intensively during the fiftieth session, as the report contained in document A/50/24 indicates.

Following the end of the cold war period, the Organization began a phase of reflection about its own nature and about the work that it needed to do in view of the profound changes that international society has undergone. This was done with a view to finding an answer to questions that had arisen with respect to the demands and challenges of that process of change.

A number of open-ended working groups have been set up for this purpose. They have been working intensively to determine how, in which respect, in which areas and to what extent we need to strengthen the activities of the United Nations and its various bodies in order to respond to the aspirations and needs of Member States effectively and efficiently.

The tasks of the Working Groups on an Agenda for Development, the financial situation of the United Nations, the question of equitable representation on and increase in the membership of the Security Council and an Agenda for Peace, and the consultations on possible new ways of financing the operational activities for development, have proceeded separately and in accordance with the mandates that this Assembly gave to each in an attempt to avoid duplication on these issues. Nevertheless, it is clear that those groups are closely linked and that the results of their efforts to find consensus responses that recognize and incorporate the opinions and concerns of all Member States, in particular their aspirations to democratization, transparency, effectiveness and efficiency with regard to matters of importance to the life of the Organization will, taken together, be a driving force behind the activities of the United Nations in the new century.

My delegation has sought to contribute positively to the work of these Working Groups, either on an individual basis or through the Non-Aligned Movement or the Group of 77, and to facilitate the broad negotiating process begun and fostered by this organ.

With regard to the Open-ended High-level Working Group on the Strengthening of the United Nations System, the member countries of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Group of 77 decided to act in concert through the Joint Coordinating Committee. In this respect, the delegations of Colombia and Costa Rica served alternately as spokesman for the developing countries members of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Group of 77, which are chaired by each of them respectively.

On behalf of the Joint Coordinating Committee, Colombia and Costa Rica stressed the need to restore the political authority of the Assembly in various areas of the system, including peacekeeping operations; the fundamental importance of its ability to rely on an adequate and predictable supply of resources so that the Organization can fully perform its functions; and the essential need for it to redefine its relationship with other organs, in particular the Security Council.

They emphasized that the Secretariat should carry out its activities on the basis of the principle of delegation - that is, on the basis of the mandates and directives that it receives from the General Assembly - and that the search for efficiency and the introduction of modern administrative methods should in no way be used as pretexts to dismantle programmes that are of concern to developing countries. During the Group's seven substantive sessions, and on the basis of this general set of principles, more specific statements were made on the various items under consideration and analysis.

Although, as was only reasonable to expect, the Working Group did not reach any final conclusion on the issues it was discussing, we believe that the exchange of opinions and points of view on this issue, which is of great importance to the future of the Organization, has been useful. It is our wish and resolve to continue working next year with the same determination in order to explore formulas to satisfy the interests of all the parties involved in the negotiations.

Mr. Moreno (Cuba) (*interpretation from Spanish*): At the outset, I should like to associate my delegation with the condolences that you, Mr. President, and our colleagues have conveyed to the Government and people of Honduras. I believe that these condolences should be translated into effective and concrete action in solidarity on the part of the international community.

We have come together today to address an issue whose importance to and impact on the future of the United Nations is well known. Developments in the deliberations that have taken place in the Open-ended High-level Working Group on the Strengthening of the United Nations System reaffirm the opinion shared by many Member States that the negotiating process should provide us with a new opportunity to redirect our energies towards a process of strengthening, rather than redefining, the activities of the Organization. Within this process, we must consider what kind of reform is desirable and possible in the present circumstances, in which the majority of developing countries have problems central to their survival, while at the same time they are essential and sovereign participants with full rights in the activities of the United Nations.

The imposition of a new plan for the Organization that responds to the interests and priorities of only one part of its membership would, in the short term, result in the United Nations losing its universality and in the distortion of the original guiding principles that governed the creation of this forum for joint multilateral action. We believe that the report of the Working Group, contained in document A/50/24, embodies a premise of fundamental importance and influence: the work of the Working Group should proceed on the basis of the fact that its mandate, established in General Assembly resolution 49/252, is to enable the Organization better to fulfil the purposes articulated in the Charter, and genuinely to respond to the aspirations of its Members.

We believe that, in order to discharge this mandate, the Working Group should concentrate on negotiating and adopting measures to enhance the capacity of the General Assembly effectively to carry out its functions and exercise its powers as the sole universal organ of the Organization. The delegation of Cuba believes that the report of the Working Group provides a comprehensive account of the divergences and convergences of view and of the many proposals that have emerged from the study of the various aspects of the reform and restructuring process of the Organization.

On this occasion, we should like to reiterate the positions and proposals that Cuba supports and to which it attaches the greatest priority in this process. These form part of the common position of the countries of the

Non-Aligned Movement and the Group of 77, through the activities of the Joint Coordinating Committee within the Working Group.

The report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization should be made available in timely fashion and in all the official languages before the beginning of the general debate, so that it may be properly considered. We should study that document in depth in order to determine the extent to which the mandates established by Member States have been carried out and to enable Member States to establish common priorities in the context of the major political, economic, social administrative and financial issues on the agenda of the Organization.

The report of the Secretary-General should include a new section describing the political and economic objectives of the United Nations for the following year, taking into account the fact that responsibility for setting priorities lies exclusively with Member States. It would also be appropriate for the reports of the principal organs of the United Nations, including the Security Council, to be studied substantively by the General Assembly. The report of the Security Council should be debated in depth; on the basis of that debate, informal consultations should be held after the debate in plenary session, led by the President or one of the Vice-Presidents of the General Assembly, to enable the General Assembly itself to adopt appropriate measures and to formulate the recommendations that are warranted.

As many Member States have recommended, consideration of the Council's report should not be conclusive in nature; rather it should be kept open with a view to holding further discussions, bearing in mind, among other things, the possibility that other reports may be presented, particularly the special reports of the Council as also provided for in the Charter.

As far as the work of the General Assembly plenary is concerned, we believe that since this is still the Organization's highest forum, it would not be appropriate for its debates to be redefined or restructured to accommodate unilateral priorities but, rather, to respond to the legitimate concerns and interests of the overwhelming majority of the Organization's membership. The General Assembly's rules of procedure and their application to the plenary's agenda should not be the subject of reinterpretation which might place members at a disadvantage or hamper the discussion of a particular issue or issues.

The role and authority of the President of the General Assembly could be strengthened in a manner in keeping with the Charter and with the mandates of the Assembly itself. However, to speak solely in terms of the resources required by the President's office would, in our view, be taking a limited approach. There is a need to enhance the President's authority by institutionalizing procedures making it possible to tighten links and to revitalize the Assembly's activities vis-à-vis other principal organs of the Organization, first and foremost the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council.

At the same time, the subsidiary machinery of the General Assembly is of key importance in the life of the Organization. Bearing this in mind, and in keeping with the mandate contained in resolution 47/233, the deliberations of the Working Group should strive to strengthen the role of the main committees and not promote any unnecessary and artificial fusion of their structures, mandates or agendas. Any proposal aimed at rationalization, biennialization or triennialization of items on the Committees' agendas should be based on the provisions of resolutions 47/233 and 48/264.

We are ready to continue to contribute to the study and negotiation of aspects relating to the level, volume and distribution of the resources available to the United Nations. However, we believe that this should not in itself constitute the main objective in the process of reform, strengthening and restructuring of the Organization. The decisions and mandates adopted by Member States in relevant resolutions of the General Assembly, such as resolution 41/213, which approved the Organization's new budgetary process, have unquestionable relevance and validity today as never before. If we insist on speaking about the question of redistribution of resources, then the first premise that my delegation would reaffirm would be that any redistribution of resources within the Secretariat and the United Nations system in general should give priority to programmes and activities designed to promote economic and social development, as provided for in the mandates given by Member States to the Secretariat and the Organization - programmes that not only during this period of non-payment crisis, but also throughout the years of the Organization's existence, have always fared the worst.

We consider that the United Nations should have an efficient, flexible and cohesive Secretariat. The Secretariat should keep its pyramid structure, and should

correspond to the principles established by the Charter, particularly in Article 101, that are designed to guarantee and expand appropriate geographical representation within the Secretariat, including the more senior levels of staff. Its geographical, ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversity should be preserved.

The ideal way of achieving this objective is not by applying arbitrary measures in the form of cutbacks, mass dismissals or redeployment, but by applying the guidelines of the General Assembly on personnel issues consistently, while observing and bolstering the principle that the Secretariat must be accountable in a strict and transparent fashion for the execution of the mandates entrusted to it by the Organization's only universal organ - that is, the General Assembly.

We believe also that it is necessary to address the question of the election of the Secretary-General. This process should be transparent, and the General Assembly should play a fundamental role in the consultations and conclusions. We need to consider the proposal for the formalization of a direct and genuine relationship between the Security Council and the General Assembly which would ensure the necessary review of the provisions of Article 97 of the Charter - chiefly, the non-use of the veto by permanent members of the Security Council during this process and the feasibility of the establishment of a candidate search committee made up of members of the General Assembly and the Security Council.

In conclusion, the United Nations should continue to be useful, necessary and a supreme unifying force. At a time when interdependence, globalization and regionalization are being debated and, indeed, sometimes almost clash in international relations, this Organization should be the main forum for reflection and concerted action. It should not be a forum that institutionalizes injustice. Rather, it should promote its own guiding principles - and above all the principles of sovereignty, sovereign equality, self-determination of peoples and non-interference in the internal affairs of States - as enshrined in the Charter itself.

Mr. Bergh (South Africa): South Africa associates itself with the previous speakers in extending its sympathy and support to the Government and people of Honduras in this time of need.

My delegation followed the debate in the Open-ended High-level Working Group on the Strengthening of the United Nations System during the Assembly's past session with keen interest. We wish to express our appreciation for the manner in which the two Vice-Chairmen of the Working Group guided our deliberations during the session. My delegation also welcomes the recent appointment of the Permanent Representative of Norway, Ambassador Biorn Lian, as one of the Vice-Chairmen of the Working Group. There is no doubt that his experience and able manner will, together with the capable leadership of Ambassador Shah of India, greatly facilitate our discussions during the current session.

As we enter the second session of our consideration of the agenda item before us, there are those who believe that our deliberations thus far have not progressed much beyond the starting point at which our substantive discussions commenced in January of this year.

While this may be true with regard to some of the issues before us, it is also true that there are certain areas where there has been a convergence of views, as noted in annex II of the report of the Working Group (A/50/24). The report clearly represents an exhaustive synthesis of the views expressed during the debate and my delegation believes that it provides a sound basis for the continuation of our discussions.

It has become clear that the efforts to reduce our current endeavours, aimed at strengthening the United Nations system, to a mere paper exercise designed to cut programmes and posts in the Secretariat have failed. While we recognize that we need to eliminate waste and duplication, efforts to bring about a streamlined, responsive and accountable Secretariat should be undertaken without such measures having a negative impact on development programmes.

My delegation fully supports the initiatives introduced during our discussions that are aimed at creating effective mechanisms for the thorough discussion by the general membership of issues that are considered in the Security Council as well as of those items that are discussed directly in plenary meetings, before these items are formally introduced.

We believe that such discussions will enhance our consideration of those issues and ultimately contribute to our efforts to strengthen the important political role of our Organization.

My delegation is of the view that real breakthroughs are possible if we, as delegations, bring open minds to the innovative proposals that are introduced during our

discussions and take stock in an objective manner of how to advance our deliberations.

To this end, we urge delegations to bear the following points in mind. We recognized the need to create a Working Group on this agenda item and this, by implication, means that we are locked into the process of delivering a better United Nations to the twenty-first century. We need to revisit those areas where we felt improvements could be made and set priorities as to how best to achieve them. We need to acknowledge that our deliberations are not limited to strengthening only one or two components of the United nations system, but more specifically to enhancing the relationships between the various organs of our Organization. It should be recognized that any attempt to use the Working Group for the purposes of advancing certain narrow, national agendas will leave us wandering around aimlessly from one session to the next and that such attempts will frustrate proceedings. Finally, we need to realize that the process in which we are involved is not only that of modernizing our Organization to meet the challenges of the next century, but also that of making the United Nations system more relevant, so that it may respond to the changing needs of mankind.

With this in mind, my delegation looks forward to participating in a constructive manner in our discussions on the substantive issues before us, once these resume in earnest in the new year.

I wish to conclude by noting my delegation's satisfaction with the working methods of the Working Group and our belief that the approach of proceeding on the basis of discussion of regularly updated conference room papers will lead us to a situation in which we will be able to present to the General Assembly a comprehensive set of recommendations on how we, as Member States, hope to strengthen the United Nations system.

Mr. Erwa (Sudan), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Mr. Mabilangan (Philippines): I should like to join other speakers in expressing sympathy and condolences to the people and Government of Honduras on the destruction and loss of lives caused by the hurricane. We express our solidarity with them and wish them a speedy recovery from this natural disaster.

Based on the report of the Open-ended High-level Working Group on the Strengthening of the United Nations System and the latest working text, a convergence of views appears to exist on a number of issues, especially those pertaining to the strengthening of the General Assembly. Thus, we strongly believe that the Working Group should build upon that convergence by making the present draft language more precise in order to reach agreement on those issues at an early date. Such agreement would contribute to strengthening the General Assembly and enhance its ability to fulfil its role and responsibilities as laid down in the Charter.

It is also important that further detailed consideration be accorded to issues, particularly those regarding the Secretariat, on which a convergence of views does not yet exist. More specifically, we suggest particular attention be devoted to the following issues in the Working Group regarding the General Assembly, since they appear amenable to early agreement.

First, the present language in the working text on the report of the Secretary-General opens the door to increased policy interaction between the Assembly and the Secretariat, including the Secretary-General. We should thus seek more precise language in the working document with regard to establishing an appropriate mechanism, procedure or method of work to enable the General Assembly to conduct a detailed, in-depth consideration of the Secretary-General's report and to improve the Assembly's ability to adopt a meaningful response to it. The report of the Security Council is another issue to be considered, but I shall speak more on that at tomorrow's debate on agenda item 11.

Secondly, a more transparent process is needed in the formulation of the speakers' list for the general debate in the Assembly, inasmuch as the current process is non-transparent. The present language in the working text provides a good basis for establishing such transparency.

Thirdly, concrete measures should be taken to ensure a more transparent process for negotiating and adopting resolutions under items considered in the plenary segment of the General Assembly - a process that, in not a few cases, is conducted with very little transparency and not open to the participation of all interested States. The language in the present draft text provides a basis for positive action to redress this situation, and we should build upon it.

An issue that requires further in-depth discussion relates to proposals for merging certain committees and subsuming ad hoc committees under their respective mother committees. In principle, ad hoc committees

should not be subsumed, for they deal with specific issues and have the expertise and specialization that the Main Committees lack.

On the subject of the Secretariat, a more effective and efficient Secretariat is desirable and needed. The Secretariat must be accountable to the Member States without the latter micro-managing its activities. We should therefore look closely at proposals aimed at improving the administration, management and cost-effectiveness, the independent character, professionalism and diversity of United Nations staff. But these should not be attained through the reduction or abolition of United Nations programmes or activities of proven importance to the developing countries. Nevertheless, we note that the Working Group's discussions on issues related to the Secretariat are not as advanced as those on the General Assembly.

With those points in mind, the Philippine delegation wishes to highlight some issues being considered by the Working Group on the Secretariat. First, while micro-management of the Secretariat should be avoided, too much flexibility for the Secretariat is also undesirable, especially on matters concerning the deployment or redeployment of resources to fulfil mandates. The General Assembly must be consulted on such matters. Moreover, the budgetary process should remain within the competence of the General Assembly.

Secondly, there should be a more transparent process for selecting the Secretary-General of the United Nations, including more meaningful participation by the General Assembly.

Thirdly, there is an urgent need to ensure full implementation of the principle of gender balance in the Secretariat at all levels.

Fourthly, the Secretariat policy on short-term appointments, and the growing practice in the Secretariat of utilizing personnel funded from extrabudgetary resources or on loan from Member States should be examined. The United Nations must avoid too much subcontracting of its work.

Finally, the delegation of the Philippines looks forward to further progress in the Working Group, especially on matters pertaining to the General Assembly. We recognize too that more work and examination of issues related to the Secretariat are needed.

Mr. Marrero (United States of America): My Government joins those who have spoken previously in expressing its deepest sympathy and support for the people of Honduras affected by the recent flooding disaster that occurred: the victims, the families and all others who are suffering as a result of what took place.

The United States delegation strongly supports continued efforts to work out a blueprint for United Nations reforms. A comprehensive set of significant reform measures is needed to impress upon capitals the ability of the United Nations to serve shared global interests in the evolving world community of the twenty-first century.

My delegation is pleased that, at its fiftieth session, the General Assembly recommended that the mandate of the United Nations Open-ended High-level Working Group on the Strengthening of the United Nations System should be extended into the fifty-first session. This way, Member States are able to continue efforts to agree on a blueprint for proposals for United Nations reforms.

We are looking forward to the reconvening of the Working Group at the earliest opportunity. The role of the President in chairing this Working Group will be well supported by its two Vice-Chairmen, the Permanent Representative of India, Ambassador Shah, and Ambassador Hans Jacob Biorn Lian of Norway whom we are pleased has stepped forward to fill the vacancy created by the departure of his predecessor, the Permanent Representative of New Zealand, Mr. Colin Keating, to whom we are deeply indebted for the contribution he has made to the Working Group.

As planned, the Working Group will continue to consider ways to improve the United Nations in three general areas: its institutional design, managerial functions, and intergovernmental routines.

The United States strongly supports continued efforts to work out a comprehensive blueprint for United Nations reform through the continuation of the Working Group and pledges its cooperation and support to ensure a fruitful outcome. We will be looking for such an outcome sooner rather than later, and we believe that when the Working Group resumes it should begin its work by considering concrete proposals for action on those issues that have already been adequately debated and on which there is some convergence of views. Subjects that we believe should be considered early for action rather than continuing debate include: the

consolidation of Secretariat departments engaged in development; and budgetary reform, including the mandates, functions and composition of the Committee for Programme and Coordination, the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions and other bodies involved in the preparation of the budget.

As a contribution to the Working Group's debate, last February the United States submitted a comprehensive package of proposals for the Working Group's consideration. Those proposals included restructuring the United Nations Secretariat, consolidating related entities, rationalizing related programmes, phasing out marginal entities or programmes, modifying mandates in need of review, enhancing the policy-setting role of the Economic and Social Council, and improving intergovernmental processes. My delegation looks forward to an opportunity to continue to discuss the wide variety of proposals and to arrive at an agreement to implement promptly those on which we all agree.

In capitals, there is a fervour for fashioning better multilateral tools for our shared use. Many regional groupings and blocs of like-minded States have met over the course of the year and have routinely found that the world needs the United Nations, but a United Nations that is well designed and well managed to deal with today's and tomorrow's challenges.

Under the stewardship of its bureau, the Working Group sensibly programmed its efforts to address proposals related to Secretariat reform and to the General Assembly. My delegation was impressed at the level of consensus achieved on these proposals as expressed in the Working Group's conference room paper reproduced as annex II of the report of the Working Group. That paper also wisely recommended to the fiftieth session of the General Assembly that the Working Group's mandate be extended, which was wisely agreed to by the Assembly.

Just as important as the Working Group's concrete accomplishments is the sense of urgency for reform that it has engendered throughout the Organization. The reform spirit has caught on. Last spring, the ninth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development undertook some overdue self-diagnosis and decided to merge programmes, streamline sessions and downsize its bureaucracy. The regional commissions have each analysed their priorities and need for reform. The Secretariat's Efficiency Board has installed a suggestion box and is now implementing 400 projects, from paperwork reduction to personnel downsizing. Delegations have been minding the coin, living within the cap of the 1996-1997 budget. And we find substantial support from all parties towards outlining a zero growth regular budget for the 1998-1999 biennium.

As we proceed on issues, the Working Group depends upon the valuable input of the staff of the Efficiency Board under its Special Director Mr. Ed Luck. Their compendium of United Nations reform proposals taken from the vast amount of literature on the subject is not only required reading for the Working Group, but is in itself a milestone for all interested in United Nations affairs. The work requires Member States' ongoing voluntary contributions, of which the United States has sent $50,000. Also, our delegation has found that the Working Group is just as needful of the seriously overdue Secretariat organization manual for identifying the structures, mandates and activities of the Organization which we as stewards are charged to reform.

Our global household has been changing significantly. We need a United Nations that is designed to meet its changing needs. The Working Group will continue to draft a blueprint for improved institutional design, management, and intergovernmental processes. Once again, we look forward to the Working Group's next meetings under the chairmanship of the President.

Mr. Campbell (Ireland): I would like to express the European Union's deep sympathy with the Honduran Government and people in the aftermath of the recent disaster, a time when they will need the solidarity and support of the international community.

The statement which I am about to make on behalf of the European Union on the strengthening of the United Nations system is joined by the following associated countries: Bulgaria, Cyprus, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia.

The strengthening of the United Nations system, like that of any organization, is an ongoing process. There are times when that process assumes particular urgency or importance. The fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations was agreed to be such a time. Great changes in the world had brought new challenges for the United Nations. They had also revealed shortcomings and underlined the need for adaptation and renewal.

The setting up of the Open-ended High-level Working Group on the Strengthening of the United Nations System was an important part of the wider

process of reform. That Group began its work only a little over a year ago. It has concentrated its work on ways to make the General Assembly and the Secretariat more effective. Several member States of the European Union have made substantial voluntary contributions to the trust fund of the Working Group, thus assisting in the conduct of its past and future work. The compendium of United Nations reform proposals is a valuable source of background information in this regard.

We are satisfied that the Working Group's discussions to date have been thorough and constructive. It is a tribute to the Vice-Chairmen of the Group that it has made considerable progress, within a year, in identifying a range of concrete means that could meet the Group's objectives. It is important, however, that we should reach firm decisions on such issues at the earliest possible date.

The European Union wishes to express its deep appreciation to the former President of the General Assembly, as well as to the Co-Vice-Chairmen, for the skilful manner in which they guided and inspired the Open-ended Working Group during the last General Assembly session. We thank them for their considerable efforts, which have resulted in the production of the report of the Working Group on the Strengthening of the United Nations System, referred to in the decision adopted by the General Assembly on 16 September 1996. The working papers which they and the Secretariat prepared helped significantly to focus the Group's work. We believe that these working methods could help us in other areas and that the report offers a good description of the proceedings of the Working Group over the past year. We are encouraged by what the Group has achieved during that period. We also now pledge our cooperation to the new Vice-Chairman, Ambassador Biorn Lian of Norway.

We are pleased that the most recent conference room paper, which appeared as document WGUNS/CRP.12, was attached as annex II to the report of the Group; we understand that this conference room paper will be the starting point for renewed discussions. We were happy to note that opinions among Member States on the subjects under discussion within the Group were converging more closely on many issues. Indeed, the European Union finds merit in most of the proposals and conclusions contained in the paper - many of which it has itself advocated - and is confident that the acceptance of many of them by consensus is perhaps not far from being attained.

The European Union holds the view that the Working Group must continue to implement the mandate set out in resolution 49/252, which brought the Group into existence. We welcome the initial focusing that has taken place on the functions, role and powers of the General Assembly and the Secretariat. In this fifty-first session, we should agree on clear operational decisions that will improve the functioning of the General Assembly and the working of the Secretariat to the fullest extent possible. As soon as such decisions have been taken, other issues within the present mandate should be considered.

It is, in fact, already encouraging that the spirit, if not the letter, of some of the ideas and proposals that are still under discussion for strengthening the United Nations system are beginning to find some reflection in the proceedings of this session. The European Union wishes to pay tribute to the President, for the leadership which he himself has given in this respect. In a variety of important ways, he is anticipating the more effective role of the President of the General Assembly which the Working Group on Strengthening the United Nations included among its objectives.

Progress foreseen in the report is also already materializing in other ways. The agenda and the conduct of meetings are being rendered more efficient. Implementation of the important resolution 50/227 is under way. The General Assembly will be considering a more extensive involvement of civil society, and enhanced efficiency and cost-effectiveness are resulting from management reform in the Secretariat.

These developments offer encouraging signs. If the Working Group translates discussion into action during this session, this initial progress can be put on a much broader and more secure footing.

The Working Group approached its work - and will continue to do so - from the perspective that its mandate for strengthening the United Nations system, derived from General Assembly resolution 49/252, was to enable the United Nations better to fulfil its Charter mandate and to meet the aspirations of its Members. The European Union also takes this occasion to reaffirm the urgent and overriding priority it attaches to resolving the financial crisis that is plaguing the United Nations.

We recognize of course that there are difficulties still to be overcome in achieving consensus on some of the important issues covered in the discussion paper in question. Such questions, for which time was not available during the past session, will have to be dealt with once more. On the basis of the work so far, we

remain confident that the Working Group will be able to maintain the required momentum and sense of purpose necessary to achieve a successful outcome to its future deliberations. In order to achieve such an objective, we once more take this opportunity to stress our belief that our efforts must be concentrated on improvements in the structures and work methods of the Organization, not on cost-cutting measures.

In conclusion, I would like to take this opportunity to assure the President of the European Union's commitment to continuing its cooperation with all other delegations in order to carry forward the very useful progress which has been achieved by the Working Group to date. We attach great importance to the issues which this Group is considering and we look forward to seeing our deliberations yield concrete results during the current General Assembly session.

Mr. Swamy (India): My delegation expresses its deepest sympathy to the people and Government of Honduras in the wake of the natural calamity, and expresses its support for them in this hour of need.

The Open-ended High-level Working Group on the Strengthening of the United Nations System has made considerable progress in its work since its establishment only about a year ago.

Created in the midst of uncertainty and some controversy regarding its possible role, composition and mandate, it has since identified and made progress on specific subjects for discussion. Issues have been referred to it by some other negotiating groups, and the inclusive nature of participation as well as the exclusive nature of subjects selected has dispelled many of the perceived causes for apprehension.

My delegation welcomes the fact that the report of the Working Group to the General Assembly contains not only a procedural description of its work, but also a substantive document, in annex II, indicating areas in which there has been some convergence of views and others in which more detailed discussions are required for a convergence to develop. The relative success of the Group's work is also owed to the innovative working methods introduced by the two Co-Vice-Chairmen; my delegation would like to pay our compliments to Ambassador Colin Keating and Ambassador Prakash Shah.

I also welcome the fact that the Working Group has clearly enunciated that it has focused its work on improving the capacities of the General Assembly to discharge effectively its functions, role and powers and of the Secretariat to carry out effectively and efficiently the mandates of the intergovernmental processes with the necessary transparency and accountability. It has, correctly, not seen its mandate as responding to an immediate financial crisis.

The report has several useful ideas on improving the debate and intergovernmental response to the report of the Secretary-General, more effective consideration by the General Assembly of reports of other organs, better utilization of time of the plenary Assembly and the Committees, enhancing the status of the plenary Assembly, rationalization of the agenda, and better preparation for the work of the General Assembly. There are also proposals for better intergovernmental oversight and accountability of the Secretariat, improving the effectiveness of the budget process and enhancing the capacity and effectiveness of the Secretariat.

The issues on which further detailed discussion is required before a convergence of ideas develops include the budget process, the role of the Committee for Programme and Coordination and the manner in which the participation of major groups, including non-governmental organizations, can be promoted throughout the United Nations system. When the Working Group resumes its discussions early next year, it should focus initially on reaching a consensus on these issues. My delegation believes that discussions in the Working Group have reflected the seriousness with which Member States approach this Organization and have attempted to improve its efficiency and effectiveness, even while dealing with the often unjustified negative public perceptions. It is this spirit of constructive goodwill which we hope will enable an early consensus, particularly on rationalization of the agenda, enhancing the status of the plenary Assembly, future decisions on the term and appointment of the Secretary-General, and oversight and accountability of the Secretariat.

My delegation is in favour of all efforts to eliminate duplication and waste or to streamline the international bureaucracy. But we do not see either this Group's work or the overall reform scenario as a purely cost-cutting exercise, nor do we believe that the interests of all and the aspirations of many will be served by divorcing the United Nations from its economic and social responsibilities. As the Declaration on the Occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the United Nations emphatically pointed out, the challenge of our times is to

redirect the United Nations towards greater service to humankind, especially to those who are suffering and are deeply deprived. The needs of development, for instance, are far from satiated and the commitments made in the recent world conferences are tremendous. If we are indeed able to cut costs and save money through one aspect of reform, we must ensure that these savings are reinvested in the United Nations priorities currently starved of funds.

Even though the Working Group has so far dealt with two major items - the General Assembly and the Secretariat - its mandate is to work on the strengthening of the United Nations system. The work and functioning of the United Nations system, including relations with the specialized agencies and the Bretton Woods institutions, are areas which my delegation hopes will be taken up in the subsequent phase of work.

The Heads of State or Government of the non-aligned countries, at their meeting in Colombia in October last year, also commented extensively on the approach to the reform of the United Nations. They, *inter alia*, reaffirmed their abiding commitment to the principles and purposes of the United Nations Charter. They emphasized the need to democratize and enhance the effectiveness of the Organization and declared that the highest priority and the greatest challenge to the United Nations in the new era is the promotion of social and economic development. In this respect, they emphasized the need for restoring the primacy of the Organization's role in the restructuring of international economic relations on the basis of justice and equity. They emphasized that the role of the United Nations should be geared towards the positive transformation of international society, the promotion of economic and social development, the maintenance of international peace and security and the promotion of a better understanding among peoples. Our reform exercise should not be an end in itself but should be approached and achieved with these objectives in mind.

My delegation pledges itself to pursue further work in the Group guided by such perspectives on the purposes and goals of the Organization.

Mr. Abdellah (Tunisia) (*interpretation from French*): Following the recent natural disaster in Honduras, I too would like to express our sympathy for and solidarity with that friendly country in the hope that the Government and people of Honduras will quickly recover from this ordeal with the assistance of the international community.

Speaking on agenda item 48, entitled "Strengthening of the United Nations system", I would like to thank the Co-Vice-Chairmen of the Open-ended High-level Working Group on this issue, Ambassador Keating of New Zealand and Ambassador Shah of India. Their tireless efforts this year have enabled Member States to make progress in the consideration of this important issue for the future of the United Nations.

The contribution of the Working Group complements the work begun on An Agenda for Peace and An Agenda for Development. The discussions undertaken in this regard have also been reflected in the dialogue established in the High-level Open-ended Working Group on the Financial Situation of the United Nations, the Open-ended Working Group on the Question of Equitable Representation on and Increase in the Membership of the Security Council and the Working Group on economic and social issues.

The tasks that Member States have undertaken through these various Working Groups reflect the challenges to be faced by a renovated Organization in coping with the realities of the twenty-first century. The work we are accomplishing together can, in this respect, only strengthen the role, effectiveness and efficiency of the United Nations system, as stressed in resolution 49/252, which created our Group. This result can be attained only through the full and complete realization of the purposes and principles of the Charter.

To this end, we must first achieve the necessary commitments and consensus in drafting the reforms necessitated by evolving international relations. Regarding, more specifically, prospects for concrete action arising from the various discussions and working documents submitted for the consideration of those dealing with the question of the strengthening of the United Nations system, Tunisia would like to make a certain number of comments.

The first point I would like to emphasize is that of the mandate of the Working Group. It is clear that, following months of negotiations, the Member States now have defined the scope of action and the objectives assigned to the Working Group. That Group, which is organically independent of other groups, is nonetheless one of the main avenues for the evolution of United Nations reform.

On the basis of that multiple yet global vision, Tunisia would like to recall once again that the Assembly

and the Secretariat are the major topics that should be dealt with by the Group. With regard to the General Assembly, the Group should especially consider ways to improve its effectiveness to enable it to play its full role as defined by the Charter. Similarly, efficiency is a main objective we should seek to achieve in reviewing the functions and attributions of the Secretariat. In any case, the desired efficiency should go hand in hand with increased transparency.

Enhancing the role of the General Assembly is a focal point of the of the Group's activities. Reviewing the Assembly's relations with the other United Nations organs is also a fundamental aspect of its work. Here I am thinking in particular of the dialectical relations that should be established between the General Assembly and the Security Council. In fact, it is a matter of the appropriate implementation of provisions already present in our Charter. More than 50 years later, an adequate match between the text and actual practice still has not been achieved.

Regarding the relationship between the Security Council and the General Assembly, I do not intend to dwell on the practical aspect and the various forms that cooperation and exchanges between those two organs should take, as that aspect should be examined in more detail in the negotiations to be held by the Working Group during the coming year. In that connection, and referring once again to the text of resolution 48/264, I should like to endorse the idea contained in document WGUNS/CRP.12 that the possibilities for stimulating a more interactive relationship between the Security Council and the General Assembly need to be further considered. That crucial point, however, has not been given the attention it deserves. It should quite logically be considered as a priority during the future work of the Group.

However, we cannot deal with the Assembly without considering the role of its President, in the context of revitalizing that body. In fact, my country believes that the President of the General Assembly should be more visible. To achieve that, he should play an active role in preventive diplomacy and also take initiatives in the area of development. The measures recommended by the Working Group regarding the role of the President of the General Assembly are a first step in the right direction.

The other point identified this year by the Working Group as a central element on which the participants should focus their interest is the Secretariat. In this statement I do not wish to deal with mechanisms to enable the General Assembly to ensure that the Secretariat respects the obligation of accountability. Nor do I wish to deal with the implementation of mandates or control mechanisms. All those issues are certainly important, even basic. Nevertheless, I believe that their consideration should be carried out in a rigorous and meticulous manner, at the right moment and within the appropriate framework.

More generally, I should like to emphasize the following. The reform we support should not entail resorting systematically to staff reductions under the pretext of budgetary discipline and efficiency. The reform to be envisaged should not call into question the existence of departments dealing with development or created in response to specific requests from developing countries. In any case, rationalization, if needed, should be carried out in an equitable manner, respecting the broad geographical balance in the distribution of posts and appointments.

We cannot speak of the Secretariat without referring to the keystone of the system: the Secretary-General. Here again our work has only just begun. But already the general outlines of an approach more in keeping with today's reality is beginning to emerge. At the forefront of the concerns expressed is the issue of transparency. We need to find the best formula to enable us to arrive at a selection process that is less impenetrable and more democratic. In that regard, the General Assembly clearly has a stronger part to play. The procedures on which that reform should be based will be introduced in the coming negotiations. The criterion of regional rotation for the appointment of the Secretary-General should also be institutionalized. In the same connection, we can and must discuss the use of the veto by the permanent members of the Security Council. Other matters, such as the duration and number of the terms served by the Secretary-General should be examined further by the Group.

All this attests to the scale of the task that lies before us to adjust this valuable instrument for peace and development: on the one hand, the General Assembly, and on the other the Secretariat, on whose effectiveness the success of all United Nations endeavours depends.

With this in view, Tunisia would like to conclude by expressing its support for the idea put forward in the Working Group's report on the need to undertake specific projects to enhance the public image of the United Nations. That activity could be based on the achievements of the Organization in the areas of development.

peacekeeping and the promotion of human rights. In order to do that, apart from the use of the traditional mass media, the United Nations could usefully apply new information technology. For that purpose, the missions of the developing countries in particular should be helped to gain access to United Nations information and to use it when required. That information should be made available in all the official languages of the Organization.

Mr. Konishi (Japan): I also should like to associate myself with the previous speakers in expressing my sincere sympathy and the sense of solidarity of my country to the people and the Government of Honduras, whose country was severely damaged by the recent hurricane.

I should like to congratulate the President of the General Assembly, Ambassador Razali Ismail, on his assumption of the chairmanship of the Open-ended High-level Working Group on the Strengthening of the United Nations System, and to pay high tribute to its former Chairman, Mr. Freitas do Amaral, for his unflagging commitment to and leadership in the important task of United Nations reform.

Permit me to recall that the purpose of our efforts in reforming the United Nations is not to downsize the Organization merely for the sake of economy. Our purpose is to strengthen the Organization by rationalizing its functioning and enhancing its efficiency and effectiveness. Towards that end, my Government has proposed that resources saved as a result of rationalization and reform be reinvested in United Nations priority activities, especially those in the field of development. It is important that during this fifty-first session we gain the broadest possible support among Member States for this general principle so that we can then establish a concrete mechanism for reinvesting savings. My delegation is willing to cooperate with other interested delegations in devising such a mechanism.

Secondly, I would suggest that the annual report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization should focus to a greater extent on those issues requiring action now and in the future, and keep its descriptions of the past performance of the United Nations to a minimum.

Thirdly, it is necessary to carefully study the role of the Committee for Programme and Coordination (CPC) in coordinating United Nations activities by setting priorities and eliminating duplication among programmes. We do not believe it is adequately fulfilling this role. In order to redress this situation, my delegation proposes that the membership of the CPC be composed of those delegations which are capable of engaging in substantive considerations of individual programmes as well as of making political judgements in setting priorities among various programmes. This would enable the CPC to contribute to a more efficient implementation of United Nations programmes. My delegation hopes that this issue will be thoroughly addressed during the fifty-first session.

Fourthly, while the President of the General Assembly has an extremely important role to play in the effort to strengthen the Assembly, his efforts in this regard have been hampered by insufficient personnel and financial resources. I believe, therefore, that an appropriate increase in the budget and support staff for the office of the President of the General Assembly should be seriously considered.

Fifthly, in the coming session it will be necessary to consider an appropriate mechanism for channelling the expertise and experience of non-governmental organizations and civil society into the deliberations of the General Assembly. The concept of a civil society forum, which was proposed during the last session, should be seriously examined in this regard.

Sixthly, I would caution that the creation of the post of a deputy secretary-general, unless carefully thought out, would simply add yet another layer of bureaucracy to the existing system, make the reporting line longer, and diminish the efficiency of the Secretariat. As a matter of fact, even without establishing the new category of deputy secretary-general, the number of Under-Secretary-General posts, of which there are now more than 20, should be reduced. The lessons we have learned with respect to the post of Director-General for Development and International Economic Cooperation are pertinent to this issue.

Finally, in the course of the discussions of the Working Group at its last session, I was often struck by the need to coordinate the efforts of the five working groups to ensure that reforms in their respective areas are carried out in a coherent manner. As we approach the final phase of our reform efforts, I would like to emphasize the need for the President of the General Assembly, together with the Vice-Chairmen of the various Working Groups, to coordinate our efforts so that they might be brought to fruition in the form of an overall reform plan containing reforms in the political, economic and social areas as well as the financial area of the United Nations.

In this uncertain and often volatile international climate, the United Nations is called upon to play an ever more active role in addressing problems in every part of the world. If it is too slow in putting the Organization in order, it will not be able to respond to the growing and urgent demands of the international community. United Nations reform is a pressing issue; we are indeed in a race with time.

Miss Durrant (Jamaica): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the 13 States members of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) which are Members of the United Nations: Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, and my own country, Jamaica. I wish on their behalf to express sincere condolences to the Government and the people of Honduras for the loss of life and the damage to property caused by the recent hurricane. We in the Caribbean are aware from direct experience of the havoc which can be wreaked by such natural phenomena, and we know that the international community will rally to the support of the people of Honduras in their hour of need.

The CARICOM countries wish to express our gratitude to the former President of the General Assembly, Mr. Diogo Freitas do Amaral, and to the two Vice-Chairmen, Ambassador Keating of New Zealand and Ambassador Shah of India, who so skilfully guided the deliberations of the Open-ended High-level Working Group on the Strengthening of the United Nations System over the past year.

During the fiftieth session, the General Assembly sought to carry forward the agenda for reform of the United Nations system, which had earlier been established. The initial efforts were geared, among other things, towards the establishment of comprehensive proposals which would guide the work of the Organization in the areas of peace and development: namely, "An Agenda for Peace" and an Agenda for Development. These were but a part of the overall efforts aimed at the reform and restructuring of the United Nations, which have taken into account the institutional capacity of the Organization as well as the policies which should guide its operations.

The commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations and the adoption of the Declaration on that occasion gave momentum to the reform process as Heads of State and Government reiterated their commitment to the Organization and pledged to work towards its reform. In their words, the aim is to

> "give to the twenty-first century a United Nations equipped, financed and structured to serve effectively the peoples in whose name it was established ..." *(Resolution 50/6)*

The mandate of the Open-ended High-level Working Group on the Strengthening of the United Nations System must be seen against this background.

The CARICOM countries have taken the view that, as developing countries, we need an international environment which would enable our countries to achieve their national goals for security and development, and to improve the standard of living of our people. We support the United Nations role in emphasizing development programmes, peace and security, and human rights. To this end, the States members of CARICOM are united in their desire to see a reorganization of the existing structures of the Organization to fulfil those goals, and we are committed to working through the High-level Working Group to achieve this end.

During the past year, it was rightly determined that the two areas that would be given immediate focus by the Working Group would be the General Assembly - as the Organization's highest intergovernmental body - and the Secretariat, for carrying out the mandates and managing the affairs of the intergovernmental machinery.

CARICOM delegations would like to see the universal nature and democratic character of the General Assembly - the most representative organ of the United Nations - preserved. We would also wish to see steps taken to enhance the capacity of the Assembly and its subsidiary bodies to provide clear and coherent policy direction.

CARICOM delegations support the proposals that are being contemplated for improving the conduct of the work of the General Assembly, such as addressing the agenda and the timing of the sessions, the length of its debates and its relationship with the Main Committees. At the same time, however, it is important that we accept the need to strengthen the role of the President of the General Assembly, consistent with our aim to enhance the stature of this main organ.

We agree that documentary support for the work of the General Assembly, such as the report of the

Secretary-General on the work of the Organization and the report of the Security Council, should be prepared and submitted in such a manner as to have more meaningful impact on the Assembly's activities.

The action taken at the recent series of global conferences to involve non-governmental organizations and civil society in the work of the Organization has paved the way for our consideration of the relationship that should obtain between these groups and the United Nations. The valuable contribution they can make cannot be ignored and we should carefully develop the modalities for their involvement in a way that does not undermine the intergovernmental work of the General Assembly and its committees.

As regards the Secretariat, I would like to recall the words of the Secretary-General when he addressed the Working Group in March of this year. He stated that

> "We need a streamlined, more coherent and responsive Secretariat. It must possess the highest standards of efficiency, competence and integrity. It must be structured to provide the most integrated and effective support possible to Member States and the intergovernmental machinery." *(A/50/24, annex III)*

We share the view expressed by the Secretary-General. It is consistent with the provisions of Article 101 of the Charter, where clear criteria for recruitment and appointment of staff are established, including the importance given to equitable geographical distribution. We believe that any proposal for a reform of the Secretariat should take into account all levels of staff, and we include in this the process for the election of the Secretary-General.

Proposals for enhancing the capacity of staff to carry out their mandates need to take account of their conditions of service, the need for mobility and promotion, strategies for training and staff development and the need to maintain the impartial character of the international civil service.

It is acknowledged that the difficult financial situation dictates that economy and efficiency be the order of the day. These, however, cannot become ends in themselves, and any reform must be linked to the achievement of the goals of the Organization.

The proposals concerning the strengthening of the role of the General Assembly and the enhancement of the capacity of the Secretariat to function effectively have been the subject of intense scrutiny in the Open-ended High-level Working Group on the Strengthening of the United Nations System. Over the past year, the Group was able to work at clarifying the various proposals. The report of the Group (A/50/24) indicates the areas on which there was a convergence of views. It is clear that renewed effort still needs to be made to consolidate the limited progress made and to move forward on the other areas with a view towards achieving consensus on all outstanding issues in the near future.

The delegations of CARICOM will continue to cooperate with the President, and with the Vice-Chairmen of the Group - Ambassador Shah of India and Ambassador Lian of Norway - and look forward to a constructive dialogue when the Working Group resumes its work.

Mr. Mohammad (Brunei Darussalam): I would like to join others who have spoken before me in expressing my delegation's sincere sympathy to the Government and the people of Honduras on the disaster caused by flooding along the northern Atlantic coast of Honduras.

Although the Open-ended High-level Working Group on the Strengthening of the United Nations System has not reached any conclusions, it has provided us with a comprehensive report (A/50/24) which will serve as a basis for our future deliberations. The Working Group has provided an important forum for finding ways to strengthen the United Nations system, and we believe that the momentum of its work should be kept up. Its work should run in tandem with discussions in other areas of the reform of the United Nations.

While we reaffirm the role of the General Assembly as the highest deliberative and decision-making organ of the United Nations system, we feel that the Assembly should continue to provide real leadership, especially in helping the international community to assess all issues, so that the right decisions can be made on the issues that are of importance to us. As mandated by the Charter, the Assembly must be able to undertake a global mission.

The United Nations needs a system that can face and withstand the new challenges of the twenty-first century. We should not allow the General Assembly to become marginalized or downgraded, either within the United Nations or on world issues. Such a situation, we believe, would in the long run make the Assembly ineffective in exercising its wide-ranging mandates, including its broad power over the Security Council. This central leadership

role requires appropriate institutional, financial and staff support. Without such support, the Assembly will not be able to perform efficiently and effectively, as its agenda is huge and complex.

At the same time, we would like to see the General Assembly more involved in the discussions of substantive issues, especially those affecting international peace and security. In addition, we should not allow the General Assembly simply to act as a rubber stamp for decisions reached by the other United Nations organs such as the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council.

We therefore support the initiative of the General Assembly to review its agenda and its process of prioritizing and streamlining its activities. We hope that such a process will preserve the credibility of the Assembly and of the United Nations as a whole. We are encouraged by the Assembly's successful completion of the general debate one day early this year. This is a very positive and significant step towards saving time and resources. My delegation believes that the discipline and commitment shown by Member States played an important role in this achievement, and that this should be maintained.

We also support further enhancement of cooperation and coordination between the General Assembly and the Security Council. To be more transparent, the monthly forecast of the programme of work of the Security Council should be circulated to the General Assembly. This forecast would be useful for Member States, especially for those that have small missions, such as ours. It would help us to prioritize our attendance at various meetings of United Nations bodies.

As the Secretariat is the key organ of the United Nations, its staff constitute the biggest asset of the Organization. We believe that for the Secretariat to remain respected, it needs staff who are committed to the work and objectives of the Organization. We therefore believe that our deliberations on reform should address the important subject of finding ways to improve the United Nations civil servants. We also believe that a number of measures need to be taken - namely, giving more training, improving the recruitment procedure, and ensuring greater diversity and balance in the geographical origins of the staff and improvement in rules and procedures. While recognizing the importance of the need, in view of its financial difficulties, for United Nations activities to be more cost-effective, we nevertheless believe that any steps taken should not be at the expense of the competence and efficiency of the staff. With regard to the recruitment process, my delegation supports ongoing efforts, in keeping with Article 101 of the Charter, to broaden geographical representation in the Secretariat at all levels, as well as to implement measures to achieve gender balance.

In conclusion, I wish to reiterate the importance of this reform to all of us in order to ensure not only that the United Nations can perform to the level of international expectations, but also that it is prepared to face future challenges. We acknowledge that making changes with the objective of improving and strengthening the system is a very demanding and time-consuming job. Nevertheless, it is important for Members to be fully committed to the importance of strengthening the United Nations system, and Brunei Darussalam is committed to giving its full cooperation.

Mr. Park (Republic of Korea): My delegation wishes to join previous speakers in expressing its deepest condolences to the Government and people of Honduras, in particular the victims of the recent flooding disaster there.

Efforts at United Nations reform, led by the Open-ended High-level Working Group on the Strengthening of the United Nations System have, since early this year, been concentrated on reshaping the roles of the General Assembly and the Secretariat. Thanks to the vigorous participation of the Member States and the able guidance of the Working Group's Chairman, progress has been made in identifying the pivotal issues involved in considering how to reorient the two bodies to better address the challenges of today.

As we enter this second half-century of the existence of the United Nations, achieving meaningful reform through the completion of the mandate of the High-level Working Group on the Strengthening of the United Nations System takes on more importance than ever before. My delegation will continue to make an active contribution, as we have done over the past year, to the discussion on United Nations reform issues at all relevant forums, including the High-level Working Group, which will resume its deliberations next year.

Our foremost goal is to make the United Nations better equipped, financed and structured so that it can more effectively fulfil its Charter-given mandate to maintain international peace and security, promote social progress and improve the freedom and quality of life for people of all nations. Today, our world is undergoing a

tumultuous and confusing transition from the old cold war order, and is beset by conflicting forces of globalization and fragmentation. In the midst of this uncertainty and chaos, our need for a more effective and responsive United Nations is greater than ever. But our efforts to reform the United Nations so that it can better cope with these new challenges can only succeed if they are backed by the strong, unified political will of the Member States.

With regard to the strengthening of the Secretariat, we believe that our reform efforts should aim, first and foremost, to ensure that the Secretariat provides the most effective and coordinated support possible to Member States. In order to secure the highest standards of efficiency, competence and integrity in its services, the Secretariat needs to continue to be able to attract and retain highly qualified personnel. We also believe that it is vital to maintain geographical, ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversity in the makeup of the Secretariat's staff, as provided for in Article 101 of the Charter.

Concerning the issue of creating the post of deputy secretary-general to coordinate day-to-day administration and management duties, we are of the view that doing so may enable the Secretary-General to focus more of his or her time on policy-oriented matters. With respect to the reform of the budget process, we believe that any change should aim to ensure an effective linkage between ends and means, mandates and resources. As unnecessary complexity and rigidity in the budgetary process could hinder the effective functioning of the Organization, we are of the view that a measure of flexibility in the budget process may be in order. In so far as the principle of accountability is maintained, excessive micro-management of the Secretariat's activities by the General Assembly may prove counter-productive. We also believe that programme budgeting improves not only priority-setting, but also transparency and accountability. In this regard, we would like to reiterate our proposal that financial resources be allocated to the 25 budget clusters, as outlined in the medium-term plans. We believe that this proposal merits serious consideration.

The process for the selection of the Secretary-General - a topic on the minds of many at the United Nations these days - is another critical target for reform. We share the view that there is a pressing need to broaden and further articulate the process. We also agree that the General Assembly should play a greater role in the process, and that the selection process should be made more transparent. Transparency is important, we believe, because it affects the Secretary-General's legitimacy, credibility and, most importantly, his or her ability to exercise leadership as the spokesperson of the international community.

We believe that the General Assembly, as the embodiment of the Organization's breadth and universality, must have the opportunity to address, comprehensively and at the highest political level, all major issues facing the international community. It must also provide effective overall policy assessment and coordination among the various organs of the United Nations system. This coordination provides the indispensable glue needed to keep the complex and numerous layers of the United Nations system working together as an effective and cohesive unit.

Of all the organs of the United Nations, none has changed more drastically in size and composition over the past 50 years than the General Assembly. We agree with many other delegations that cooperation between the General Assembly and the Security Council should be enhanced, as envisioned in the United Nations Charter and outlined in General Assembly resolution 48/264. These two principal organs must function in better harmony and balance to fulfil the role envisioned for them in the Charter. In this connection, we welcome the recent efforts made by the Security Council to bring more openness to its proceedings. Needless to say, the Security Council can better fulfil its Charter-given mandate when its decisions enjoy the broadest understanding and support of the General Assembly.

Allow me now to say a few words about my delegation's approach to the issues of United Nations reform. First of all, we believe that reform must be approached in a comprehensive manner, addressing the various aspects of the reform efforts in their totality. Although five working groups have been established under the President of the General Assembly and are currently working in their respective fields on different aspects of United Nations reform, the nature of the issues which they are all addressing is closely interrelated.

Therefore, in the light of the interrelated nature of the reform efforts in each of the five working groups, we believe that a holistic approach is necessary to ensure that their results will be mutually reinforcing. Although each Group may deal separately with reform of the political, economic, social, and financial aspects of the Organization, we should always keep in mind that all the Groups are working towards the same overall objective. While it would certainly be ideal to reach agreement on

a comprehensive package of reforms in a short span of time, my delegation is convinced that our efforts must not be abandoned if the pace of our progress falls short of our ambitions. Steady incremental progress towards consensus is better than no progress at all. Any reform effort, however, whether incremental or revolutionary, will require solid political momentum. We are concerned that, if we are unable to achieve meaningful agreement during the current fifty-first session of the General Assembly, critical momentum may be lost in achieving any reform at all. The Republic of Korea, for its part, is committed to continue to play an active and constructive role in the High-level Working Group to help ensure that a positive consensus can be achieved.

Mr. Mapuranga (Zimbabwe): This debate is helping us to take stock of what transpired during the fiftieth session in the High-level Open-ended Working Group on the Strengthening of the United Nations System. We believe that this review will undoubtedly assist us in drawing conclusions which will result in a strengthened General Assembly and a restructured Secretariat.

I hasten to emphasize that any reform that fails to strengthen the role of the General Assembly, an organ that has universal membership and is therefore the embodiment of democratic representation, is bound to fail, because it would not be addressing the aspirations and needs of the vast majority of Member States. In addition, we maintain that the reform and restructuring of the Secretariat is the responsibility of Member States and not that of the Secretariat itself. For its part, the Secretariat is obliged to respect and implement decisions adopted by Member States.

In this connection, we hope that all proposals on the reform and restructuring of the United Nations system will be considered in this Working Group, of which the President of the General Assembly is the Chairman. That is the appropriate forum. We should guard against moving the goal posts at the instance of a small group of countries. This would be contrary to the spirit of transparency and democracy which has become the hallmark of our work in the post-cold-war era.

My delegation is convinced that resolution 48/264 on the revitalization of the work of the General Assembly provides the framework for reform of the Assembly's work. In that connection, we are convinced that the office of the President of the General Assembly has to be enhanced through the provision of adequate resources. We welcome the President's efforts in promoting transparency in the Assembly's work, especially in the relationship between the presidencies of the Security Council and of the General Assembly. This is as it should be, since the Security Council, according to the Charter, is accountable to the entire membership of the General Assembly.

We call for transparency in the composition of the Credentials Committee. It is also our considered view that the compilation of the list of speakers for the general debate should equally be a transparent process. Some of us have had to scramble for speaking slots. The Secretariat has not been giving convincing reasons as to why we cannot get certain slots, while certain countries are always privileged to speak during the first week of the debate. It appears that when it comes to the generality of the membership of the General Assembly, some are more equal than others.

We have heard suggestions to streamline the activities of the Organization by declaring a moratorium on international conferences in view of the financial crisis the Organization is facing. We are not persuaded that that suggestion, which is made against the backdrop of a failure to honour international commitments made so far, has any genuine sincerity. Furthermore, we are told to downsize or right-size in order to make efficiency gains. In our view, downsizing per se does not necessarily lead to greater efficiency. While we recognize that reform might result in the reorganization and streamlining of the Secretariat, restructuring should expedite and enhance programme delivery, particularly with regard to developmental activities.

The creation of posts in the establishment, be they high-level or low-level, is the prerogative of Member States. Similarly, it is the Member States, and not the Secretariat, that determine the priorities of the Organization. We have in mind the call by the Joint Coordination Committee of the Group of 77 and China and the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries to reinstate the post of director-general for international economic development rather than to establish yet another layer of bureaucracy in a post of deputy secretary-general, presumably to deal with administrative matters.

We realize that the Working Group, under the leadership of the Co-Vice-Chairmen, former New Zealand Ambassador Colin Keating and Ambassador Prakash Shah of India, covered a very wide number of issues without necessarily reaching agreement. The parameters have been drawn. We therefore have an opportunity, under the President's indefatigable

leadership, to address the crucial issues of reforming the General Assembly and the Secretariat, as well as the entire United Nations system, so that they truly serve the interests of the vast majority of Members sitting here in the General Assembly.

Mr. Ayewah (Nigeria): Allow me, on behalf of the Nigerian delegation, to join other delegations in expressing sympathy to the Government and people of Honduras for the recent tragedy they have suffered.

The United Nations has come a long way since its inception in 1945 in its development and evolution as a multilateral instrument and platform for harmonizing the conduct of States as they interact among themselves in a spirit of fruitful cooperation and in promoting multilateralism in international relations.

Over the years, the United Nations has come to represent a bastion of hope for the weak and a salutary but convenient companion for the strong among us. It has come to be identified with the goals of peace and security, socio-economic development, the protection of the environment and the progressive development and codification of international law. Within these parameters we cannot but conclude that the United Nations continues to serve the basic purpose of its establishment.

After 50 years of existence the United Nations has certainly grown. It has had its vicissitudes in terms of successes and failures. But the most strident of its experiences relates to a perception that it is biting off more than it can chew in the areas of crisis management and conflict resolution, in its delivery of development programmes, in the democratization of its principal organs and in cost-effective management.

The paradox is that while Member States continue to multiply their demands on the United Nations, they are not equipping it with the requisite human and material resources to enable it to cope with the demands or to deliver in terms of results.

As we see it, the Organization can only be what Member States want or enable it to be. That is why the current financial crisis facing the United Nations negates the principle of viability for the Organization and constitutes an indictment of our disposition to fulfil our Charter obligations as Members of the world body. The message from this podium can only be that we must all endeavour to assist the Organization to achieve its purposes and objectives and to respond to our collective wishes and demands by assuring it of a sound financial base.

No issue has claimed greater international attention in recent times than the proliferation of conflicts, with all their implied destructive consequences, including population displacement and human suffering, and the steps - at times hesitant - taken by the United Nations to contain or resolve them over a long drawn-out period. Whether in Bosnia or in Rwanda, Somalia or Liberia, the issue has remained the same, namely, the inability of the United Nations to respond quickly, concretely, effectively and definitively to resolve a prevailing crisis.

In saying this, no one is suggesting that the United Nations has not made an effort. That would be untrue, dysfunctional and unjustified criticism. United Nations efforts have counted for much in saving lives and properties in many conflict situations. We are saying, however, that the United Nations can certainly do better if Member States readily and willingly make available to it the requisite human, material, financial and logistical resources in support of preventive diplomacy, peacekeeping and peacemaking. The recourse to arms as a means to settle disputes has been proved to be inappropriate, inadequate and simply destabilizing. It would be a fitting legacy to future generations and a potent contribution to the goal of the Organization if nations could agree to beat swords into ploughshares in the interest of peace, security and development.

We have all come to accept that the democratic principle is responsible, representative and worthwhile. It implies participation in decision-making. It is for these reasons, among others, that the democratization of the principal organs of the United Nations and their working methods has become not only topical but desirable. It is a subject that has become not only contentious but highly sensitive. In the social and economic fields, the Economic and Social Council has largely succeeded in its structural reform aimed at achieving efficiency, transparency and effectiveness.

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of the Security Council, which has primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. The call for equitable representation on and an increase in the membership of the Security Council has suffered irretrievably from an unwillingness on the part of States to distance the principle from a certain perception of the subject matter. In other words, Member States should concern themselves more with the principles of equitable

distribution, representativeness, transparency and so on rather than with a geopolitical consideration of the qualifications of the aspirants.

A strengthened United Nations is one that is well managed, thoroughly responsible and responsive, equitably representative, transparent, efficient and cost-effective. To achieve this, there must be an increase in both categories of membership of the Security Council, namely permanent and non-permanent membership. Most important, the configuration of power discernable in its composition must reflect the realities of our time. In this connection, the imbalance of the under-representation of one region in relation to another, and the anomaly of the non-representation of whole regions, particularly of Africa, in the permanent membership of the Security Council must be corrected in a reformed Security Council in the interest of equity and justice and the credibility of the United Nations.

Development is an evolutionary process. It feeds on the prospects and possibilities of incremental growth in socio-economic performance. Sustainable development represents an aggregation of those prospects and possibilities over a sustained period and given a sustained level of performance. In the present effort to achieve sustainable development, the United Nations has counted much on espousing the values of cooperation, shared responsibility and partnership. A strengthened United Nations system should seek to maximize the value of the interdependence of economies and the mutuality of interest in sharing experiences within the ambit of North-South and South-South cooperation as we pursue sustainable development.

One cannot but conclude that the progressive development and codification of international law would benefit from the recognition of the primacy of national laws in their interaction with applicable international law in the conduct of States; in the preservation of the environment and ecological balance; in respect for basic human rights and fundamental freedoms; in the need to contain and eradicate the inordinate and indiscriminate bite of terrorism; and in the espousal of the democratic ideal. A strengthened United Nations system which recognizes, promotes and asserts the rule of law should seek to build on the gains recorded so far in these various fields of human endeavour.

The various scenarios I have just described assume that the relevant organs and bodies of the United Nations system will be redefined and restructured in order to be able to cope with the demands placed on them and to meet the expectations of Member States. Such restructuring would involve the General Assembly, the highest policy-making body of the United Nations, including its Main Committees and other subsidiary bodies and their working methods; the Security Council, that seemingly exclusive club with a differentiated membership, charged with the responsibility of maintaining international peace and security; the Economic and Social Council; the Secretariat, including the office of the Secretary-General, and most important, the resource base of the Organization.

As is well known, the Open-ended High-level Working Group on the Strengthening of the United Nations System is already addressing these subjects in their specificity and details. The Nigerian delegation is making its own contributions to the debate. However, progress in the Working Group has been rather slow. In the circumstances, one can only urge the Working Group not to pursue interminable debates but to redouble its efforts and come out with specific recommendations which are viable and can be implemented so that the United Nations can enter the next millennium as an efficient, effective and manageable Organization.

In concluding, I cannot but draw attention to the ongoing debate, or exertions, about the appointment of the next Secretary-General and the role of the General Assembly. In line with the provisions of the Charter, a Secretary-General is appointed by the General Assembly on the recommendation of the Security Council. In other words, ultimate responsibility for appointing a Secretary-General actually rests with the General Assembly. The Assembly should therefore not abdicate that responsibility to any other body or organ, including the Security Council. More important, the appointment of the next Secretary-General must be the outcome of a transparent process and a democratic decision of the entire membership, represented in the General Assembly. It is only on such a basis and on that premise that the authority and credibility of the United Nations can be safeguarded.

Mr. Hasmy Agam (Malaysia): My delegation joins with other delegations in expressing profound sadness and condolences to Honduras in the wake of the tragedy that has struck that country and its people.

Let me now congratulate the President of the fiftieth session of the General Assembly, Mr. Diogo Freitas do Amaral, in his capacity as Chairman, and his two Vice-Chairmen, Ambassador Prakash Shah of India, and

Ambassador Colin Keating of New Zealand, for their tremendous efforts in leading the Open-ended High-level Working Group on the Strengthening of the United Nations System. Given the important results achieved so far, the Working Group will hopefully be able successfully to conclude its assigned task during this session.

It will be recalled that at its last substantive session the Working Group deliberated 24 main subjects under the two agreed main areas, namely the General Assembly and the Secretariat. While a consensus is yet to emerge, my delegation is heartened to note that there was a convergence of views on a large number of issues within these two main areas. Nevertheless, there are a number of other important issues which require consideration as well as action. Today's debate provides the occasion to raise some of these issues as well as to reiterate our position on other issues. This debate will hopefully obviate the need for further or prolonged debate when the Working Group convenes and will consequently allow the Working Group to negotiate on issues for action.

The United Nations system has to be strengthened and modernized to enable it better to fulfil its mandate as enshrined in the Charter, namely, to build, promote and preserve peace in all its aspects and for all the peoples of the world. In strengthening and modernizing the United Nations, the emphasis has to be on enhancing legitimacy, addressing inequities in decision-making processes and promoting efficiency and effectiveness better to meet the changing, complex needs of Members. The ultimate objective of reform cannot be reduced to cutting costs or just addressing the current financial crisis.

The General Assembly is the most democratic and the only universal organ in the United Nations system, where all Member States are equally represented and where all issues are considered in a comprehensive context. Notwithstanding its Charter-mandated powers and functions, its role has regrettably eroded amid efforts by other principal organs to encroach on the areas of competence of the General Assembly. The task and the challenge is to prevent the erosion and to reverse the encroachment through the revitalization and modernization of the General Assembly.

The General Assembly, as the most democratic and universal body, and in asserting its Charter-mandated powers, should invoke in clear terms Article 15, which reads as follows:

"1. The General Assembly shall receive and consider annual and special reports from the Security Council; these reports shall include an account of the measures that the Security Council has decided upon or taken to maintain international peace and security.

"2. The General Assembly shall receive and consider reports from the other organs of the United Nations."

The General Assembly should insist on full implementation of the provisions of this Article. Following the submission of all these reports in a timely manner, the Assembly must seriously consider the reports and make its pronouncements, especially through relevant resolutions. Debates on these reports should become a central feature of the work of the Assembly, as it would make explicit what has been implicit: that the General Assembly, as the most universal body, remains the overview, if not the supreme, body.

Modernization of the General Assembly entails prioritization of the scope of its work and rationalization of its working methods. The Working Group has made much progress in this area, and we hope that greater progress can be made during this session.

Given the overview mandate of the General Assembly, it must play a meaningful role in rendering operational Article 97 of the Charter, dealing with the appointment of a Secretary-General. The General Assembly should be involved fully in the selection process; it cannot be a body whose sole function is to routinely endorse a decision taken elsewhere. By becoming fully involved and informed, the United Nations membership would guarantee that the process of selecting and appointing the Secretary-General is transparent and democratic.

In the Working Group, Malaysia has proposed that the Secretary-General be appointed for a single non-renewable term, perhaps of six or seven years. My delegation recalls that even the former Secretary-General, Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar, himself eloquently argued for a single non-renewable term. We have also argued for a termination clause, as provided for in the constitutions of virtually all Member States.

On the question of senior management, my delegation is of the view that we should seriously consider the creation of the post of deputy secretary-

general for development affairs. A similar post, at the level of Director-General, was indeed established by a General Assembly resolution in the past, but the post has since been abolished. While micro-management of the Secretariat by the intergovernmental process must be avoided, the intergovernmental machinery and the Secretariat must work closely together. There should be no battle over turf, as the Secretariat should implement fully and on time the mandates established by the intergovernmental process.

Article 101 of the Charter advocates the principle of equitable geographical representation in appointments to senior positions in the Secretariat. This principle, as well as the concept of an international civil service, would be seriously compromised if, as a result of budget-cutting, loaned officers were to serve the United Nations in increasingly large numbers. We cannot have a situation in which more than 80 per cent of the officers in certain sections of the Secretariat are on loan from Member States. While we are prepared to recognize the expertise and special skills which some of the loaned staff may bring to this Organization, we need to be mindful of the implications in the short and long terms. Clear guidelines should be drawn up which should spell out the threshold for loaned staff and the duration of their service, which should be short-term.

My delegation wholeheartedly supports streamlining and revamping the United Nations. We must, however, be cautious if □right-sizing□ or downsizing is merely selective and intended to promote specific interests. Streamlining and cost-saving measures need to be implemented across the board, be it in the Security Council, the Secretariat, or the other principal organs and bodies of the United Nations system. We must not allow cuts to be made only in areas dealing with development.

The proper and timely utilization of technology would promote productivity and contribute towards savings. In this era of technical innovation, information technology has increasingly and rapidly become an important management tool. My delegation supports all endeavours to pursue an information technology plan with a view to providing all Missions with on-line access to documents and appropriate United Nations information. Given the varying capacities of Member States, efforts must be made to ensure that all have access to such modern facilities.

My delegation supports efforts to strengthen the General Committee to ensure its effective role in organizing the work of the General Assembly. This could be achieved through the principles of participation and partnership, instead of that of exclusivity. Thus, the automatic membership of the permanent members of the Security Council in this Committee is obviously incompatible with this principle. And where permanent members have been endorsed by the Assembly to sit on United Nations bodies, they should discharge their responsibilities like all other Members, such as in serving as Vice-Presidents of this Assembly.

The Working Group should also examine closely the composition of the Credentials Committee as well as the process leading to the election of its members. Malaysia would not be averse to concentrating the general debate into two weeks, with established guidelines for the speakers list. The current system is highly subjective and exposes the Secretariat to all forms of pressure and manipulation.

Finally, my delegation deems it necessary that the office of the President of the General Assembly be strengthened, notwithstanding the obvious need for me, as a member of the Malaysian delegation, to be circumspect on this issue during this session. We believe that, aside from requiring additional resources, the President has a key role to play in establishing a regular consultation mechanism with the presiding officers of other organs, especially of the Security Council and of the Economic and Social Council.

Programme of work

The Acting President: I should like to remind members that, as announced in today's *Journal*, the General Committee will meet on Wednesday, 27 November, at 9.30 a.m., in Conference Room 4, to consider two requests for the inclusion of additional items on the agenda of the current session of the Assembly.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.